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AMBITIOUS ALBERTA FOUGHT FOR AUTONOMY WHEN OTHERS WERE SILENT

Ottawa, Feb.1: It is over a dozen years since autonomy was first broached in the West, and it is interesting to note that the earliest scheme launched had in view that breaking up of the Territories which was later dropped by the guiding spirits of the west, and which now finds some countenance here. In 1891 or 1892 there was a small agitation for Albertan autonomy. Several projects wereeveolved, one being annexation to British Columbia. The desire for provincial status of some sort became activee in 1895. The idea of becoming the eastern fringe of British Columbia still was the subject of talk, but the idea which found most advocates was that of erecting Alberta into a separate province. An Albertan Autonomy Association was formed and for a while was active. One figure in it was Mr. Arthur L. Sifton, now Chief Justice of the Territories. The agitation while active did not gain substantial support. The Premier, Mr. F.W.G. Haultain, for example, opposed it. In the following year, in 1896, the cause of Albertan autonomy made its appearance in the Territorial legislature and suffered defeat. A motion was brought in dealing with the constitutional and financial position of the Territories. An amendment was offered to this, declaring for the erection of Alberta into a province. This was resisted by the government as premature and was voted down. It may be con-

jectured that the Territorial government already had formed the purpose of asking in due time for the erection of the whole of the Territories into one large province.

The matter slumbered until the Territorial general election of 1898, and then Mr. Haultain brought it to the front as an issue. Speaking at various places, notably at Yorkton and Calgary he declared that the time for attaining the provincial status had come, and that the question should be settled during the life of the coming legislature. His influence was strongly on the side of making one province. Following up this declaration, the Territorial government approached the federal authorities. In 1900 a memorial was presented asking that the question be taken up and decided. In a speech made to the legislature the premier expressed the opinion that the new province should come into existence co-terminous with the end of the sitting house, say on New Year's day, 1903. The federal government was asked to open negotiations, take accounts and otherwise make preparations for the approaching change of status. The petitioners however, were put off on the ground that parliament was in session, and the Dominion elections followed.

Throughout 1901 the demand for autonomy was pressed briskly. Messrs. Haultain and J.H. Ross went as a delegation to Ottawa and spent a couple of months in urging the Dominion government to action. They discussed the matter at some length with a strong sub-committee of the cabinet, which included Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Mr. Fielding, Mr. Sifton and

Mr. Haultain, in which the minister of the interior admitted that the time had come to consider the question of autonomy. Again, however, the question was put off. In December, 1901, and January, 1902, the matter was once more the subject of discussion, Mr. Haultain submitting an exhaustive bill. So far as the Dominion government was concerned the matter has stood still since then. In the Territories, Mr. Haultain went to the country in 1902 and swept it on the autonomy issue. The legislature is overwhelmingly with him. Since 1902 the legislature has at every session passed a memorial reiterating its demand for provincial status. Now at last the question is to be settled.